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### **The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.**

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

An Account of the greatest English Poets.

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*An ACCOUNT of the Greatest English*  
P O E T S.

To Mr. H. S. April 3, 1694.

*S*INCE, dearest Harry, you will needs request  
A short account of all the Muse-possess, *And God*  
That, down from Chaucer's days to Dryden's times,  
Have spent their noble rage in British rhimes;  
Without more preface, writ in formal length,  
To speak the undertaker's want of strength,  
I'll try to make their sev'ral beauties known,  
And show their verses worth, tho' not my own.

Long had our dull fore-fathers slept supine,  
Nor felt the raptures of the tuneful Nine;  
'Till Chaucer first, a merry Bard, arose,  
And many a story told in rhyme, and prose.  
But age has rusted what the Poet writ,  
Worn out his language, and obscur'd his wit:  
In vain he jests in his unpolish'd strain,  
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain.

Old

Old *Spenser* next, warm'd with poetick rage,  
 In ancient tales amus'd a barb'rous age;  
 An age that yet uncultivate and rude,  
 Where-e'er the poet's fancy led, pursu'd  
 Thro' pathless fields, and unfrequented floods,  
 To dens of dragons, and enchanted woods.  
 But now the mystick tale, that pleas'd of yore,  
 Can charm an understanding age no more;  
 The long-spun allegories fulsom grow,  
 While the dull moral lyes too plain below.  
 We view well-pleas'd at distance all the fights  
 Of arms and palfries, battels, fields and fights,  
 And damsels in distrefs, and courteous knights.  
 But when we look too near, the shades decay,  
 And all the pleasing landschape fades away.

Great *Cowley* then (a mighty genius) wrote,  
 O'er-run with wit, and lavish of his thought:  
 His turns too closely on the reader press:  
 He more had pleas'd us, had he pleas'd us less.  
 One glittering thought no sooner strikes our eyes  
 With silent wonder, but new wonders rise.  
 As in the milky-way a shining white  
 O'er-flows the heav'ns with one continu'd light;  
 That not a single star can shew his rays,  
 Whilst jointly all promote the common blaze.  
 Pardon, great Poet, that I dare to name  
 Th' unnumber'd beauties of thy verse with blame;

Thy

Thy fault is only wit in its excess,  
 But wit like thine in any shape will please.  
 What Muse but thine can equal hints inspire,  
 And fit the deep-mouth'd *Pindar* to thy lyre:  
*Pindar*, whom others in a labour'd strain,  
 And forc'd expression, imitate in vain?  
 Well-pleas'd in thee he soars with new delight,  
 And plays in more unbounded verse, and takes a nobler flight.

Blest man! whose spotless life and charming lays  
 Employ'd the tuneful Prelate in thy praise:  
 Blest man! who now shalt be for ever known,  
 In *Sprat's* successful labours and thy own.

But *Milton* next, with high and haughty stalks,  
 Unfetter'd in majestick numbers walks;  
 No vulgar heroe can his Muse ingage;  
 Nor earth's wide scene confine his hallow'd rage.  
 See! see, he upward springs, and tow'ring high  
 Spurns the dull province of mortality,  
 Shakes heav'ns eternal throne with dire alarms,  
 And sets th' Almighty thunderer in arms.  
 What-e'er his pen describes I more than see,  
 Whilst ev'ry verse, array'd in majesty,  
 Bold, and sublime, my whole attention draws,  
 And seems above the critick's nicer laws.  
 How are you struck with terror and delight,  
 When angel with arch-angel copes in fight!  
 When great Messiah's out-spread banner shines,  
 How does the chariot rattle in his lines!

What

What sounds of brazen wheels, what thunder, scare,  
 And stun the reader with the din of war!  
 With fear my spirits and my blood retire,  
 To see the Seraphs sunk in clouds of fire;  
 But when, with eager steps, from hence I rise,  
 And view the first gay scenes of *Paradise*;  
 What tongue, what words of rapture can express  
 A vision so profuse of pleasantness.  
 Oh had the Poet ne'er profan'd his pen,  
 To vernish o'er the guilt of faithless men;  
 His other works might have deserv'd applause!  
 But now the language can't support the cause;  
 While the clean current, tho' serene and bright,  
 Betrays a bottom odious to the sight.

But now my Muse a softer strain rehearse,  
 Turn ev'ry line with art, and smooth thy verse;  
 The courtly *Waller* next commands thy lays:  
 Muse tune thy verse, with art, to *Waller's* praise.  
 While tender airs and lovely dames inspire  
 Soft melting thoughts, and propagate desire;  
 So long shall *Waller's* strains our passion move,  
 And *Sacharissa's* beauties kindle love.  
 Thy verse, harmonious Bard, and flatt'ring song,  
 Can make the vanquish'd great, the coward strong.  
 Thy verse can show ev'n *Cromwell's* innocence,  
 And complement the storms that bore him hence.  
 Oh had thy Muse not come an age too soon,  
 But seen great *Nassau* on the *British* throne!

How

## 40 POEMS on several OCCASIONS.

How had his triumphs glitter'd in thy page,  
 And warm'd thee to a more exalted rage!  
 What scenes of death and horror had we view'd,  
 And how had *Boin's* wide current reek'd in blood!  
 Or if *Maria's* charms thou wou'dst rehearse,  
 In smother numbers and a softer verse;  
 Thy pen had well describ'd her graceful air,  
 And *Gloriana* wou'd have seem'd more fair.

Nor must *Roscommon* pass neglected by,  
 That makes ev'n *Rules* a noble poetry:  
*Rules* whose deep sense and heav'nly numbers show  
 The best of criticks, and of poets too.  
 Nor, *Denham*; must we e'er forget thy strains,  
 While *Cooper's Hill* commands the neigh'ring plains.

But see where artful *Dryden* next appears  
 Grown old in rhyme, but charming ev'n in years.  
 Great *Dryden* next, whose tuneful Muse affords  
 The sweetest numbers, and the fittest words.  
 Whether in Comick sounds or Tragick airs  
 She forms her voice, she moves our smiles or tears.  
 If Satire or heroick strains she writes,  
 Her Heroe pleases, and her Satire bites.  
 From her no harsh unartful numbers fall,  
 She wears all dresses, and she charms in all.  
 How might we fear our *English* Poetry,  
 That long has flourish'd, shou'd decay with thee;  
 Did not the Muses other hope appear,  
 Harmonious *Congreve*, and forbid our fear:

*Congreve!*

*Congreve!* whose fancy's unexhausted store  
 Has given already much, and promis'd more.  
*Congreve* shall still preserve thy fame alive,  
 And *Dryden's* Muse shall in his Friend survive.

I'm tir'd with rhiming, and wou'd fain give o'er,  
 But justice still demands one labour more:  
 The noble *Montague* remains unnam'd,  
 For wit, for humour, and for judgment fam'd;  
 To *Dorset* he directs his artful Muse,  
 In numbers such as *Dorset's* self might use.  
 How negligently graceful he unreins  
 His verse, and writes in loose familiar strains;  
 How *Nassau's* godlike acts adorn his lines,  
 And all the Heroe in full glory shines.  
 We see his army set in just array,  
 And *Boin's* dy'd waves run purple to the sea.  
 Nor *Simois* choak'd with men, and arms, and blood;  
 Nor rapid *Xanthus'* celebrated flood,  
 Shall longer be the Poet's highest themes,  
 Tho' gods and heroes fought promiscuous in their streams.  
 But now, to *Nassau's* secret councils rais'd,  
 He aids the Heroe, whom before he prais'd.

I've done at length; and now, dear Friend, receive  
 The last poor present that my Muse can give.  
 I leave the arts of poetry and verse  
 To them that practise 'em with more success.  
 Of greater truths I'll now prepare to tell,  
 And so at once, dear Friend and Muse, farewell.